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Viewing cable 07QUITO1124, CORREA ESCALATES WAR AGAINST THE PRESS

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Understanding cables

Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
- The bottom box presents the body of the cable. The opening can contain a more specific subject, references to other cables ([browse by origin](#) to find them) or additional comment. This is followed by the main contents of the cable: a summary, a collection of specific topics and a comment section.

To understand the justification used for the classification of each cable, please use this [WikiSource](#) article as reference.

Discussing cables

If you find meaningful or important information in a cable, please link directly to its unique reference number. Linking to a specific paragraph in the body of a cable is also possible by copying the appropriate link (to be found at the paragraph symbol). Please mark messages for social networking services like Twitter with the hash tags **#cablegate** and a hash containing the reference ID e.g. **#07QUITO1124**.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
07QUITO1124	2007-05-16 22:01	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL//NOFORN	Embassy Quito

Appears in these articles:

<http://m.elcomercio.com/wikileaks/cable.php?c=a87ff67>
<http://m.elcomercio.com/wikileaks/cable.php?c=e4da3b7>
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VZCZCXYZ0000
OO RUEHWEB

DE RUEHQT #1124/01 1362201
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 162201Z MAY 07
FM AMEMBASSY QUITO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7015
INFO RUEHBO/AMEMBASSY BOGOTA PRIORITY 6655
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS PRIORITY 2552
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ MAY 0595
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA PRIORITY 1663
RUEHGL/AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL PRIORITY 2331
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RHMFISS/CDR USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL

C O N F I D E N T I A L QUITO 001124

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

STATE FOR WHA/PPD: MDCONNORS, WHA/AND: JKEIL, DRL/AWH:

JMUNOZ

E.O. 12958: DECL: TEN YEARS

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [EC](#)

SUBJECT: CORREA ESCALATES WAR AGAINST THE PRESS

REF: QUITO 0565

Classified By: PolOff James Cohen for reasons 1.4 (b)& (d).

¶1. (U) Summary: President Correa ramped up his war of words and legal battle with the press May 15 by once again referring to the media as "mediocre and incompetent". While signing documents adding further charges of "insult" to his pending lawsuit against the daily newspaper La Hora, Correa vowed to fight "corruption in all of its forms", including the mass media. End Summary.

BACKGROUND: "INTOLERABLE" AND "OFFICIAL VANDALISM"

¶2. (U) President Correa escalated his war against the press in general and specifically against the national daily newspaper La Hora by adding to his already pending lawsuit against them, filed on May 5. During a highly publicized press conference with Pichincha Fiscal (State Attorney General equivalent) Washington Pesantez, Correa held over his head, with Truman-like aplomb, a late April La Hora headline, "Correa Assaults the Junta Bancaria", referring to what La Hora perceives to be heavy-handedness on Correa's part towards the banking sector. While this article is not at the center of the law-suit against La Hora, Correa used it as an example of the kind of "irresponsibility and falsehood" that he will not tolerate, suggesting the possibility of additional actions of this kind.

¶3. (U) Observers trace the genesis of the continually escalating confrontation with the press to the Ecuadorian Newspaper Editor Association's (AEDEP) editorial entitled "Intolerable", which appeared several weeks ago, on the front page of eleven major Ecuadorian dailies -- an unprecedented example of coordinated press rebuke to a sitting president (reftel). The editorial, which placed blame for the recent congressional impasse on all branches of the Ecuadorian government, was nonetheless critical of President Correa's unwillingness to intervene and stabilize the situation. In the weeks following the editorial, Monica Chuji, Presidential Palace spokesperson, embarked on a series of spats with the media, most notably with La Hora, accusing them of inappropriately criticizing President Correa.

¶4. (U) Soon after the demonstrations in front of Congress, on March 9, 2007 La Hora published an editorial "Official Vandalism" which criticized the raucous behavior "pro-government groups" during demonstrations in front of the congress and suggested that Correa did little to stop them. The Correa administration reacted with outrage and Chuji publicly called for an apology, which was never given. A series of open letters between Chuji and the editors of La Hora were published, adding fuel to the fire. Other major dailies throughout Ecuador supported La Hora in its ongoing battle with Chuji. With La Hora willingly playing with the government in its game of brinkmanship, Correa filed suit against La Hora on May 5. Since the law-suit was filed, AEDEP has actively defended La Hora's right to publish the editorial in question, further irritating President Correa and his spokespeople.

OTHER MEDIA CONCERNS

¶5. (C) The back and forth between the Correa Administration and the media is being played out in a somewhat tense environment for media organizations. The government has publicly confirmed that it is in the early stages of developing state-owned and run national television and radio stations and one or more newspaper outlets. While details of the formats and management of these outlets are still unclear, many agree that the move will involve the "reallocation" of television or radio frequencies. Many in

the media are also consumed with rumors that the government may be interested in taking over the nation's oldest newspaper, (Guayaquil's "Telegrafo.") Correa has also singled out various outlets and even specific journalists for harsh criticism in recent weeks during his long and rambling Saturday radio addresses. It has also been noted in journalistic circles that La Hora's director, Francisco Vivanco, was Sub-Minister of Government in the administration of President Leon Fabres Cordero, whose center-right PSC party does not support President Correa. PSC deputies were amongst the 57 dismissed by the Supreme Electoral Tribunal on March 8.

COMMENT

16. (C) In January 2007, during embassy-sponsored workshops on freedom of the press, embassy contacts in the media noted that candidate Correa had not threatened "direct action" against the media and that they hoped that trend would continue. Correa's law suit against La Hora, his criticism of AEDEP's support for the law-suit, and his constant anti-press rhetoric (referring to the media owners as "corrupt mafiosos"), represent a disturbing new pattern. No doubt emboldened by high approval ratings, Correa is determined to prevent the media from tarnishing him or his agenda in any way. Embassy contacts in the media fear that his intimidation tactics may result, at a minimum, in self-censorship on the part of the press. It is too early to tell if the free and robust press Ecuador currently enjoys is in jeopardy, but the situation requires diligent monitoring. Various press and civil society organizations have expressed concern that relatively archaic "insult laws" still remain on the Ecuadorian books. Correa does run the risk of having an antagonized and bullied press turn on him if, as was the case with so many of his predecessors, his political fortunes sour. But for now, he is clearly willing to take that risk and run with it.

JEWELL